

Inyo Crew: Jane Sheffer

On April 28, 2008, I wrote in my journal, "It's strange to hear the phrase 'At the end of the season' so much is going to happen between now and then." Now, nestled in my sleeping bag perched halfway up the hill overlooking mountains silhouetted in sunset, and listening to the sound of my crew's laughter echoing through the canyon, I realize how very true that was.

I didn't know that the C's was a youth development program. I was slightly confused but did not pursue the topic when, during my phone interview in March, Tessa informed me that backcountry crews are made up of the widest variety of folks they can find, from college graduates to high school drop-outs. It seemed of little importance to me at the time. I assumed most would be like me; middle-class college kids needing a break from school or life, or maybe environmentally savvy young adults seeking some adventure. How very wrong I was, and how very influential the reality turned out to be.

I feel that the greatest thing about Backcountry, and what allowed me to learn and grow the most, is the diversity of people on the crew. What an opportunity to meet, befriend, and become family to people that you never would have associated with before. Rather than just a job or a personal adventure, Backcountry became a group endeavor, a challenge in acceptance, and trust; a bond strengthened by laughter, pain, and respect. Cheesy as it may sound, sometimes I can almost feel my heart swell with admiration as I look around at all the faces of my crewmates, happy to know them, grateful for their hard work and to know their stories, and sad to leave them.

I think that my Backcountry season has influenced me to be more tolerant and accepting of all people. You never know what you are going to learn about others, so it is good to hold off on judgment, and simply try to understand.

I feel happy and a little surprised that, even when plopped amongst such a diverse group, I felt secure enough in myself to not be encouraged to alter who I think I really am. I felt like a strong foundation of a person, in a context wonderful to build upon.

I have learned to listen, to observe, and to participate, to stop questioning so much and do something, to take pride in community, that sometimes doing the minimum is best, pain goes away and your body will recover, though you are not always invincible, it is easier to get to know people if you talk to people.

Thank you Karlson Hubbard for your dedication to this crew and thanks to all who make Backcountry possible.